<h1>‘Making a House a Home’: odd deposits in ordinary households in later medieval Ireland 1200-1600 AD
<h1>‘Mon chez-moi’: placer délibérément des choses dans des maisons médiévales en Ireland 1200-1600 AD
<h1> “Ein Haus zum Zuhause machen": Fürsorge und ungewöhnliche Deponierungen in gewöhnlichen Haushalten im spätmittelalterlichen Irland 1200-1600 n. Chr.

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<h2>Abstract
During the period 1200-1600 AD there were significant events both local and international that may have impacted on the well-being of medieval householders in Ireland. Is it possible to access the material traces of the spiritual, emotional and sensorial lives of medieval people in Ireland which may have been shaped by related uncertainties? This article explores how care, as central part of the organisation of later medieval households, is directly related to the placement of meaningful objects in particular places in houses in Ireland. Here, ‘odd deposits’ are catalogued and explored as one part of the wide-ranging practices of care that were carried out by medieval people. In doing so, it is established that Ireland participated in the wider European tradition of deposition and concealment of things to ‘make a house a home’.
<keywords>Keywords: medieval households, material practices, odd deposits, care.

<h2>Résumé
Au cours de la période 1200-1600, il y a eu des locaux et internationaux événements importants qui peuvent avoir un impact sur la vie et le bien-être des ménages médiévaux en Irlande. Est-il possible d'accéder aux traces matérielles de la vie spirituelles, émotionnelles et sensorielles des Irlandaises médiévaux surtout leurs réponses par les incertitudes associées à cette époque? Dans cet article, on explore comment les soins sont directement liés au placement d'objets significatifs dans les maisons en Irlande. Ici, les ‘dépôts étranges’ sont catalogués et explorés comme une partie des pratiques matériel de soins qui ont été menées

par les peuples médiévaux. Alors, c’est connue que l'Irlande a participé à la tradition Européenne plus large de dépôt et de cachette d'objets pour creér ‘mon chez-moi’ <keywords>Mots-clés: des maisons médiévales, des pratiques quotidiennes, dépôts étranges’, les soins.

<h2>Zusammenfassung

In der Zeit von 1200 bis 1600 n. Chr. gab es bedeutende lokale und internationale Ereignisse, die sich auf das Wohlergehen der mittelalterlichen Haushalte in Irland ausgewirkt haben könnten. Ist es möglich, die materiellen Spuren des spirituellen, emotionalen und sensorischen Lebens des mittelalterlichen Menschen in Irland zu erforschen, die möglicherweise von den damit verbundenen Unsicherheiten geprägt waren? In diesem Artikel wird untersucht, wie die Fürsorge als zentraler Bestandteil der Organisation spätmittelalterlicher Haushalte in direktem Zusammenhang mit der Platzierung von bedeutungstragenden Gegenständen an bestimmten Orten in irischen Häusern steht. Hier werden die "ungewöhnliche Deponierungen" katalogisiert und als Teil der weitreichenden Praktiken der mittelalterlichen Menschen zur Fürsorge erforscht. Dabei wird festgestellt, dass Irland an der breiteren europäischen Tradition des Deponierens und Verbergens von Gegenständen teilnahm, um “ein Haus zum Zuhause machen".

Schlagwörter: mittelalterliche Haushalte, materielle Praktiken, seltsame Deponierungen, Fürsorge.

<h2>Introduction

During the period 1200–1600 AD, Ireland, like many other places across Europe, experienced cultural upheavals, population displacement, invasions and settlement. Ireland was ‘home’ to many people with different identities, ethnicities, genders and social status. Despite this broad spectrum, archaeological studies of the later medieval period have tended to concentrate more on castles or religious houses, and fewer explorations have been made of the homes of ordinary women, men and children living in cities, towns, villages, and rural dispersed settings. This gap in our studies may have been related to issues regarding survival; the above ground preservation of urban medieval housing in Ireland is also relatively poor and virtually non-existent for rural settlements (*O’Conor 1998*). In the past a lack of excavated evidence in Ireland impeded archaeological research on ordinary medieval lives; however, we now have large amounts of relevant excavated data from which we can explore non-elite lives (e.g.

Hanley – Hurley 2008; *Corlett – Potterton 2009*; *Brady 2014*; *Gardiner – O'Conor 2017*; *Bolger 2017*).

From the mid- to late 20th century as the first later medieval houses were excavated in Ireland, it seemed that their archaeological expression was very recognisable with evident stone foundations and wide-ranging material culture, as at Caherguillamore or Bouchier's Castle, Co. Limerick and Piperstown, Co. Louth (*Ó Ríordáin – Hunt 1942*; *Cleary 1982*; *1983*; *Barry 2000*). But, as more examples were revealed, it seemed that the remains were increasingly fragmentary; scant evidence could include a hearth or postholes which indicated the former presence of a potential dwelling, as at Duncormick and Ballyanne Co Wexford (*Richardson 2002*; *Moran 2000*). Fortunately, in the past two decades relatively substantial sub-surface traces of later medieval houses were unearthed, such as at Two Mile Borris, Co. Tipperary (*Ó Droma 2008*), Ballinvinny, Co. Cork (*Cotter 2009*) and Mullamast, Co. Kildare (*Bolger 2017*) or late medieval examples at Portmarnock, Co. Dublin (*Moriarty 2011*) and Tildarg, Co. Antrim (*Brannon 1984*; *Gardiner 2018*). For the most part these houses are rectangular with a (somewhat central) hearth, opposing doorways in the long sides of the structure or a single door, and occasionally with internal divisions understood as 'rooms' (e.g. *O'Conor 1998*, 56–57). Their construction style ranges from sill beam (wooden horizontal timbers plus uprights) and external drip trenches to stone foundations with timber frames and, also, cob superstructures (*Gardiner – O'Conor 2017*). Also present are earth fast post and wattle houses which O'Conor argued are more predominant in Gaelic-Irish contexts (*O'Conor 1998*, 95–97; *O'Conor 2002*) although one example was excavated at the late medieval site of Movanagher, Co. Derry (*Horning 2001*). While roofing materials are harder to identify, thatch (straw / rushes) seems most likely; although, wooden shingles as well as slates and tiles have been revealed (e.g. Camaross, Co. Wexford, *Tierney 2009* and Portmarnock, Co. Dublin, *Moriarty 2011*, 183). Of course, houses of alternative styles exist outside these broad generalisations such as oval shaped examples with sod walls, as at Derrylea, Co.Galway, (*Gardiner – O'Conor 2017*) or cob houses with stone chimneys, as at. Ballinvinny (*Cotter 2009*, 53; *2013*, 49–58).

Morphology *is* an important part of 'knowing about' later medieval houses, but this is only one material aspect of people's lives. In Ireland, research has emphasized the empirical analysis of physical remains and multi-scalar landscape approaches (*O'Conor 1998*; *Gardiner – O'Conor 2017*; *Gardiner 2018*). However, this has not yet included explorations of life as revealed through material culture or spatial arrangement of households. In this way, archaeological studies of later medieval houses in Ireland lags behind that of their nearest

neighbours in Britain as well as continental Europe (*Smith 2009a*; *2009b*; *Goldberg 2019*; *Gardiner 2018*; *Svensson 2014*). My project 'Home is Where the Heart(h) is' analysed detailed information from 43 rural sites and ca. 70 structures to understand more fully some of the material practices of later medieval households in Ireland (*Dempsey 2020*; *Forthcoming*). I am keen to explore 'how' people in later medieval Ireland made a house a home and the ways in which their lives (actions, relationships and experiences) emerged through ongoing interactions between themselves and other people, places and things. These interrelations are understood as practices – ways of acting, embodying or demonstrating relationships and social values (*Robb 2010*, 494; *Pauketat 2001*). This practice-based approach is inspired by decades of work on the importance of asking 'How' as much as 'Why' (*Bourdieu 1977*; *de Certeau 2002*; *Pauketat 2001*; *Joyce – Lopiparo 2005*). In this article, I focus on one underexplored aspect of daily life in medieval Ireland: practices which comprised the placement of objects in particular places i.e. 'odd deposits' (*Gilchrist 2019*). Using archaeological evidence from medieval houses, I argue that deliberate deposition or concealment of things is one part of the material expression of care within medieval households in Ireland.

<h2>Expressing Care: Identifying Odd Deposits

In the medieval period, care and health maintenance were one part of a complex medicinal and spiritual framework that involved physical, mental and emotional health of people (*Dempsey 2021*; *Rawcliffe 1995; Ritchey 2021*). These included a range of practices from spatial organisation and technologies of food, fire, crafts and horticulture to the reinforcement of emotional bonds which all facilitated the reproduction of different types of social relations and identities (*Dempsey 2021)*. Care in day-to-day household life involved such things as mending clothes or making bread to the nurture of children and care for the dead. Belief or different aspects of lived religion were also central to caring practices including spoken prayers and protective charms (*Gilchrist 2012*, 226, 259; *2018*; *2019*;). Gender and feminist archaeology have identified that these wide-ranging domestic activities are not foregrounded in archaeological narratives despite their pivotal roles in maintaining society (*Montón-Subías – Sanchez Romero 2008*). In exploring archaeological remains through the lens of care we can demonstrate the enmeshed material dimensions of belief, emotion and everyday life of medieval people in their homes.

Odd deposits, such as the placement of mummified cats or leather shoes in walls and under the eaves of roofs or the burials of animals remains, inclusion of unusual objects (i.e. glass) as

well as quern and whetstones in postholes, pits and hearths in house floors, is now accepted as a folk practice in the medieval and early modern period across Europe (*Merrifield 1987*, 123; *Carelli 1997*; *Hoggard 2015*; *Hukantaival 2016*; *Gilchrist 2019*). The term 'odd' is itself somewhat problematic as these practices were likely part of rather than separate from daily medieval life. Generally, the placement of certain objects in particular places are viewed as foundational, opening or closing deposits that meaningfully act upon the world, including householders and houses, in important ways (*Gilchrist 2012*, 230). They are often placed at significant locations i.e. thresholds, corners, hearths. Numerous examples are known in England (e.g. *Gilchrist 2012*, 229–31; *Hoggard 2015*; *Davies & Houlbrook 2021, 21-33*). Standley (*2013*, 83) suggests that a silver brooch purposefully placed close to the hearth at a medieval house in West Hartburn is a special deposit. Similarly, at Shapwick, Somerset, an inverted cistern was also found in a house beside a hearth (*Aston – Gerrard 2007*, 207). Related practices occur in Wales - such as the shoes and animal remains revealed at Llancaiach Fawr Manor, Rhymney Valley (*Hoggard 2015*, 274). In Scotland. a Bronze Age barbed-and-tanged arrowhead was recovered from a posthole of a building on the Perth High Street (*Hall 2005*). This wider practice is also known in Ireland (*Penney 1976*; *Dowd 2018*); yet, in the context of later medieval archaeology, there has been little exploration of this phenomenon.

My current research project has revealed 21 occasions from 14 sites out of a wider sample of 43 sites and 70+ structures where there is evidence of potential special or protective deposits (*Table 1*; *Dempsey Forthcoming*). These include 'found objects' such as Roman coins or fragments of saddle querns and polished stone axes as well as quartz pebbles and crystals in pits. But, it is not only uncommon or unusual objects that were being concealed; other seemingly 'mundane' medieval things were also part of this tradition of odd deposits e.g. a coin hoard at Two Mile Borris, Co. Tipperary (*Ó Droma – Stevens 2010*) or an intact quernstone covering a pit between House I and II at Caherguillamore, Co. Limerick (*Ó Ríordáin – Hunt 1942*). Four case-studies from Ireland are detailed here as a way to explore evidence of care, belief and emotion within the traces of material practices of medieval households.

<<Table 1 : Dempsey_Table_1>>

<caption>Table 1: List of possible 'odd deposits' in rural house sites in medieval Ireland (© K. Dempsey).

Excavations at Mullamast, Co. Kildare revealed a small medieval village thought to have been a stud farm and settlement (i.e. where horses are raised) that was established in the late 12th century, and flourished during the 13th and 14th centuries (*Bolger 2017*). The site comprised multiple occupation layers with foundations and trenches being cut, re-cut or added to over a significant period of time. These included building foundations, stone and clay occupation surfaces and industrial remains, such as kilns, hearths and furnaces, occurring within a plot framework defined by roads and boundary and drainage ditches, with water features such as wells, stream channels and a pond. One object retrieved from a possible wall foundation of a house structure excavated within the settlement was a Roman coin dating from the 4th century AD, but occurring within a ca.13th-century deposit. This may have been intentionally placed in this building's foundations, rather than casual loss (*Bolger 2017,* 70). Bolger (*2017,* 44) argued that the coin could be understood as a token which may have been acquired by a pilgrim. What is significant is that this coin, which would have been at least 800 years old at the time of deposition, seems likely to have been perceived to have a material potency or magical affects (*Standley 2013*, 94–95). Similar objects, when occurring in medieval graves, are considered to have amuletic or apotropaic qualities (*Gilchrist 2008*, 119–59; *Hall 2012; Standley 2013*, 99–112). But could they have acted in a similar way for medieval houses and the people who lived in them? (cf. for example the discussion of the silver penny from the Perth High Street, in *Hall 2011*). This may mean that an individual or group of people inherited (at some point) and possibly curated this object because they understood it to have particular qualities: it contained a special power related to its rarity, its own journey or its long life. It may have been imbued with many memories as well as its own materiality of 'the past' (*Gilchrist 2012,* 237–51). The deposition of this coin, as one part of the creation of a home may be interpreted as an act of protective care for those who lived in or worked as part of the household.

At Mondaniel, Co. Cork in rural south-western Ireland, medieval householders also participated in this concealing practice. During excavations two related but separate medieval rectangular structures were revealed (*Quinn 2013*). Both comprised linear trenches, pits, postholes and stakeholes, and have been interpreted as houses dating to the 13th and 14th century. This pair of structures comprises a rural farmstead with no associated wider settlement. The largest of the two structures was situated in a roughly rectangular area (15m E-W x 7-8m N-S) defined by shallow linear trenches on the east, south and west sides and a scarped edge with numerous post and stake holes on the north side (*Fig. 1)*. The house itself was likely smaller when taking into account the surrounding drip gullies. The structure, as

discussed by Quinn (*2013*), was of sill beam construction or perhaps, instead, had simple mud walls that would also have required a shallow foundation without the need for large structural posts. This would correspond with the rectangular shaped 'ghost' feature that appears to surround the interior of the structure (*Fig. 1*). A stone-lined hearth with an adjacent metalled surface was located within the south-eastern section of the house. Doorways comprising comparatively large and widely spaced postholes were situated in the long sides diagonally opposing each other. Immediately outside of the southern doorway, a flat-bottomed round-sided pit was revealed (*Fig. 1*). This had been dug through the structure's drip gullies which indicates that it post-dated the foundation of the building but could still be broadly contemporary with the structure. It only contained a single fill within which fragments of the upper section of a decorated rotary quern were found (*Quinn 2006*, 94). These comprised incised lines which may have formed a cross shape. This cut feature was originally interpreted as a rubbish pit. However, medieval rubbish pits when present are typically located at some distance from the house. Household waste including broken items were usually deposited on manure heaps to be later spread in surrounding fields (*Astill 1992*, 79). This often results in a 'halo' effect where medieval objects are more frequently found in areas surrounding settlements (*Gerrard – O'Donnell 2021*, 753). Given that thresholds are important junctions, and that it seems unlikely that this was a rubbish pit, surely there must be significance to both this object – a fragmented decorated quern - and its deposition?

<<Figure 1 : Dempsey_Figure_1>>
<caption>Fig. 1: Mondaniel, Co. Cork House Plan (© *Quinn 2006*, Fig.14: Post excavation plan of rectangular structure, Area C).

Quernstones are relatively common in archaeological contexts of medieval houses. There is evidence of these objects being deposited in households elsewhere in Europe including medieval Finland (*Hukantaival 2016*, 88) as well as Gallo-Roman France (*Reniere – de Clercq 2018*). This tradition also existed in early medieval Ireland (*O'Sullivan 2017*) and there are examples too of prehistoric saddle querns included in medieval houses such as the floor at Baltrasna, Co. Meath or foundation trenches at Leggetsrath, Co. Kilkenny (*Fig. 2*) (*Fallon 2009*; *Devine – Coughlan 2013*). One further later medieval example of a redeposited medieval quern is evident at Boyerstown Co. Meath where a fragment was incorporated into the wall of the house (*Martin 2009*, 12). In Scotland the deposition of querns in late prehistory/early medieval through to later medieval contexts, both domestic and funerary, has

been observed (*Clarke 2013*, 44–45; *Clarke 2019*, 84; *Czére et al. 2021*, 32). My intent here is not to suggest a universal practice that centres on quernstones but rather that households regularly participated in acts that were meaningful to them in their own context. At Mondaniel, archaeobotanical evidence clearly suggests that cereals were being ground at the house for use in the preparation of foodstuffs. The grinding of grain and subsequent making of bread was a regular activity in many medieval households. In Christian cosmology bread was powerful: it symbolized the body of Christ, the Church as well as the flesh of the virgin (*Walker Bynum 1988*, 283*).* But its holy religious metaphor extended to the household and charity as well as more broadly the nourishment and support of life (*Walker Bynum 1988*, 178*).* Bread and breadmaking for feeding the household can therefore be understood as spiritually significant. The quern stone fragment at Mondaniel was inscribed with a cross, an action and subsequent material trace which embedded this object within the network of traditional Christian symbols. The quern stone's own biography was entangled with concepts of nourishment and care; as well as perhaps, the life of the person whose role it was to grind grain and maintain a good household. It is imbued with multiple technologies of health as well as diet and regimen (i.e. the regular grinding of grain) that are deeply associated with the maintenance and care of a healthy household (*Dempsey 2021*). Medieval women played a leading role in household management and ordering of routine (*Gilchrist 2012*, 114). Perhaps this fragmented quernstone can be read as a gendered special deposit relating to women's role as physical, spiritual and emotional caretakers within the house. The deliberate placement of this fragmented decorated rotary quern in a pit close to the southern entrance of the house may have demarcated this threshold as an important junction. Each time a person entered or exited the house, or stood at the doorway, under their feet were fragments of a cross-incised quern stone. This warmer, sunlit aspect may also have been where grinding or other work activities related to household care took place. This is not to create an essentialised universal link with women and caregiving but to recognise the key role of care provided by women in medieval households as a central part of life in the Middle Ages (*Ritchey 2021*).

<<Figure 2 : Dempsey_Figure_2>>
<caption>Fig. 2: Leggetsrath, Co. Kilkenny. Late Neolithic / Bronze Age saddle quern fragment (E3734:1:88) (© *Devine – Coughlan 2013*, Plate 10).

The practices of care, in terms of odd deposits, are also evident in the late medieval settlement of Portmarnock which chronologically book ends my study. Situated in north county Dublin

on the east coast of Ireland, 'Portmimocke' was granted by royal charter to St Mary's Abbey, a large Cistercian house in 1172. It remained in their possession until the 1530s as noted in the extent taken during the dissolution of the monasteries in 1540-1 (*Gilbert 1884*, 68–70, 83). The wider territory of Portmarnock appeared frequently in the historical records up to and including the Civil Survey of the seventeenth century (*Mills 1914*, 483, 509; *Gilbert 1884*, 88, 130-34, 138; *Nicholls 1994*, 353; *Simington 1961*, 174; *Moriarty 2009b, 6-10*). However, the first specific record of the village is not until 1539, which tells us it then contained 10 cottages and 9 property plots (*Gilbert 1884, 68-70*). During excavation, an extensive later medieval settlement (ca. 50-70m NS x 110m EW), including six property plots, well-defined by linear ditches and stone lined gullies was identified (*Moriarty 2009a; 2009b; 2011*). The plots, orientated broadly north-south, vary in size but on average range from 16m to 22m wide and up to 65m long. They were separated into toft (north) and croft (south) areas by internal divisions. The remains of at least five truncated buildings were revealed within the toft areas. Metalled surfaces, understood as yards, survived within the northern part of the plots (*Moriarty 2009a*, 15). However, a 19th-century roadway disturbed the northern section of the neat row of tenement plots, which were also impacted by deep ploughing during the 20th century. Generally, the Portmarnock structures appear to have been defined by low stone walls which were located within very shallow foundations. In many cases the walls or foundations have been robbed out leaving only the foundation cuts. The surviving walls appear to have only been one course in height and likely acted as dwarf walls for timber frames or mud walls. Radio-carbon dating indicates a time period of 1491-1641 (2 Sigma) for the occupation of the settlement. A number of interesting finds were revealed from musical instruments and spindle whorls to leather shoes and whittle-tang knives which tells us about the daily life of people who lived there. But, the deliberate deposition of horse skulls in two structures in two separate plots were the most remarkable of these discoveries.

Plot 2 contained two structures and a yard area to the north, truncated by the later road. The larger of the two buildings comprised poorly surviving mud-bonded limestone walls, and along the south wall a stone-pad was revealed indicating a roof support in this location. A second poorly preserved building was present in this plot and it was defined by wall cuts, a clay floor and hearth. Within this clay floor, eight horse skulls (but only one mandible) plus a pig skull, were tightly packed together before the floor was put down (*Fig. 3*). While not part of the horse deposits also present within the clay floor were the remains of a number of cats and a ferrous knife. The horse skulls size indicated the stallions were aged between 15 and 21 years at the time of death, and on average were between 12.3h.h. and 13.4h.h. The mandible

was matched to one of the interred skulls, the very youngest specimen aged 5-6 years. It was separated from the skulls and placed centrally within the deposit. Otherwise, the skulls contained no jaw bones and this means that they had been defleshed prior to interment (*Moriarty 2009a*, 37). The quantity, placement and age of the animals indicate that this is a significant deposit. In a similar but smaller despot, a single horse skull (without a mandible) was revealed in Plot 3 at the centre of a rectangular structure (8.5m x 6m) with a hearth, divided into two rooms, with metalled and clay packed floors.

<<Figure 3 : Dempsey_Figure_1>>
<caption>Fig. 3: Horse Skulls in house floor from Portmarnock, Co. Dublin (© *Moriarty 2009a*).

Horse skulls are relatively uncommon deposits, although there are other instances in medieval Ireland, Britain and wider Europe (*Hoggard 2015*, 110). In his recent survey of Britain, Brian Hoggard (*2015*, 66) revealed that there were 54 deposits of horse skulls or bones in England, 27 examples from Wales and one single recorded example from Scotland. In Ireland, gathered folkloric accounts from the mid-20th century record horse skulls deposits in floors (*Ó Súilleabháin 1945*, 49-50; *Buchanan 1960*, 60-61*; Gailey 2004*). Some (dubious) studies suggested that they improved the acoustic characteristics of the house perhaps for dancing (*Mallory – McCormick 1984; Moriarty 2009a*). Hoggard convincingly argued with substantive evidence that this was not the case (*2015*, 66-75). The examples detailed from Britain were not identical by any means but because they had been concealed in meaningful ways, it suggested that they were understood to have had a certain material potency (*Hoggard 2015*). Horses themselves were regarded as special in the Middle Ages (as in other times) and were seen to have their own beauty, vitality and personality. They were a fundamental part of medieval life and were fed and housed by people who cared for them and were not typically a regular source of food in Ireland (although some remains carry evidence of butchery i.e. Blackcastle, Co. Kildare). Although the paucity of horse mandibles from the assemblage at Portmarnock may imply that these parts might have played some other role in the household, perhaps in medicine? In medieval Wales, horse mandibles were recorded in a 14th-century medicinal text as an ingredient in poultices for infected wounds:

<quote>‘….take the jaw of a horse, with all the teeth remaining therein. Burn a cupful thereof (in powder,) and mix with pepper and lard : anoint the part with this, tempering with sage. Continue to apply this plaster daily, for a fortnight.’ (*Pughe 1861,* 68).

In medieval literary sources, it is recounted that demons were imagined as taking horse form and William de Avergne (d.1249) noted that horse bones were included in bonfires on St John’s Day, Midsummer’s Eve (*Rider 2012,* 120, 123). It is also possible that this idea that horse skulls could act as wards against demonic powers had currency in medieval Ireland. Returning to the evidence from Portmarnock, the advanced age of the stallions at death, the quantity of skulls and the treatments that they received prior to internment are indicative of recurrent sets of practices centred on particular horses. The level of attention – or care - is significant, and we must assume that these horses – or what they represented to the people of Portmarnock - were important. There were a number of choices and decisions made in advance of including the horses within the building at Portmarnock. The act of ‘making’ a skull is a labour-intensive process. The horse has to die of natural causes or be killed; then the head removed. As the skulls were defleshed prior to internment, they were buried and later unearthed or boiled to remove the skin and tissue. Every one of these actions requires a great deal of care and it is hard not to see a very particular relationship either being formed or coming to an end in this process. The arrangement of the skulls, with a mandible of the youngest specimen safely tucked within the deposit is also a careful act (full of care). With these deliberate actions in mind, interesting questions remain. Firstly, did all of these horses die at once? Or are they part of a lineage that died over a number of generations? Were those skulls then gathered over time? For how long did this curation last and why was one moment in the lifetime of one house chosen for the deposition of so many of them? Perhaps future studies including radiocarbon dating and aDNA might add new dimensions to this entanglement of human-animal relations. But, for now, what is certain is that at the time of this deposit of horse skulls in Portmarnock, there was upheaval in Ireland and Britain as well as wider Europe related to the Reformation, legacies of famine and political changes. The householders may have wanted to charm, insulate or protect their homes from such threats and these horse skulls may indicate that they mediated their anxieties through putting ‘things in the house’. The practices, at Portmarnock and other places in Ireland, around special or odd deposits need not be viewed as beyond the realms of the norm, but the very act of deposition of a meaningful object can be viewed as a rational reaction to seemingly uncontrollable things and a way of maintaining a healthy household.

<h2>Conclusion

Collectively, these examples from Ireland signpost the potential for medieval people's belief and care practices to include the deposition of individually meaningful objects. These things could act as tokens of good fortune, and the act of deposition and concealment as charms to protect and care for the wider household. It is possible that these odd deposits of ancient coins, quern stones and horse skulls performed a particular type of sympathetic magic or formed parts of healthy practices to maintain a good life. This recognises that medieval ideas of health were wide-spanning and encompassed many different practices. Unsurprisingly, it connects households in Ireland to the wider shared European ritual practice of 'special deposits', or 'odd deposits' where particular objects were deposited in particular places for reasons related to belief, magic and health (*Merrifield 1987*, 123; *Carelli 1997*; *Hoggard 2015*; *Hukantaival 2016*; *Gilchrist 2018*; *2019*). Such deliberate depositional acts are not widely studied in Ireland, but in addressing related questions to the evidence, it indicates that these practices are present and identifiable in material remains. We can explore these objects as one part of the wide range of material expressions of care. They are entangled within the complex sensorial and emotional lives of medieval people. These intangible aspects of medieval lifeways are often left out of stories of the past; but, using multiple strands of direct and indirect evidence, we can build more complex narratives of medieval households and access how people experienced and lived their lives. Creating an understanding of daily-life can be complicated but by combining evidence of people, places, animals and things a better understanding of households can be achieved in later medieval Ireland.

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